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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000068

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/E, AND EUR
PARIS/LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: BORREL AFFAIR REDUX: DJIBOUTI EXPELS FRENCH
COOPERATION OFFICIALS

REF: A. 04 DJIBOUTI 590

1B. 04 DJIBOUTI 585

Classified By: Ambassador Marguerita D. Ragsdale.
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Djibouti's president, Ismail Omar Guelleh, formally requested January 17 through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that France withdraw six of its officials acting as advisors to government institutions in Djibouti under the French Cooperation program. The move follows Guelleh's personal anger over what he sees as French government failure to bring to a swift conclusion legal proceedings emanating from the Borrel Affair. According to France's ambassador to Djibouti, Philippe Selz, French officials were given one week to depart, however an extension until January 30 was requested, and granted, due to ensuing Eid holidays.

12. (C) Selz told Ambassador that six technical advisors would leave Djibouti under the ministerial order -- one female and 5 males. Five of the six were assigned individually to the Ministries of Education, Health, and Agriculture, to Peltier Hospital, and to the Safety and Security Division of the international airport. It is unclear to which agency the sixth was assigned. The action followed the appearance on January 13 of an unusual "editorial" in the Djiboutian government newspaper "La Nation." The editorial criticized the January 11 summons of Hassan Said, Chief of Djibouti's National Security, and Djama Suleiman, District Attorney for Djibouti, to testify in a French court regarding the case brought by Borrel's widow Elizabeth. The editorial stated that Djibouti is a sovereign nation and would not submit to deposition. It noted attempts by France to depose Djibouti's ambassador to France and accused France of being "racist" and "colonialist." The editorial also stated that legal procedures instituted by the French court were an attempt to discredit Djiboutian authorities and are part of a "relentless" French campaign against Guelleh since his accession to the Presidency. The editorial concluded by declaring that "the time for cooperation and compassion had ended and the time to make decisions had come." "In short," the editorial stated, "the game is over."

13. (C) Judge Bernard Borrel, a French national living in Djibouti, was found dead under mysterious circumstances in 1995 near Lac Assal, some distance from Djibouti city. He reportedly had a bullet wound to the head and his body had been partially burned. No autopsy was performed. Conspiracy theories abound on what may have happened to Borrel. The Djiboutian government firmly believes his death a suicide. Reports of his depression during that period widely circulate. Borrel's widow is fully committed to proving Djiboutian government, and specifically Guelleh's, complicity in her husband's death. It should also be noted that a finding of suicide makes her ineligible for full retirement or insurance benefits stemming from her husband's demise.

14. (C) Selz said Djibouti wants the government of France to move to end delays in resolving the Borrel case. He had tried to explain that the government of France has no control over judicial proceedings. "They know this," he told Ambassador, "because they know very well the French system." Selz said he believes the Djiboutians are "shooting themselves in the foot" with the expulsions and that the move will be "100 per cent counterproductive." He commented that the move would also impact negatively the morale of the French military based in Djibouti.

15. (C) Speaking pensively, Selz told Ambassador he too would like France's justice system to work faster and for its journalists not to say things that might damage bilateral relations between France and other countries. Yet Djibouti knows France's government cannot control these entities. For France, Selz continued, the expulsions will mean less technical assistance to Djibouti. He mused, with regret, that there might be more expulsions to follow and planned to meet with remaining technical advisors to reassure and also to halt rumors.

16. (C) Comment: Selz had stated previously that he believed the Borrel affair would continue to weigh upon

France-Djibouti diplomatic relations for some time to come (see Ref A). The personal implication of Guelleh in the affair is the sticking point, especially with the Djiboutian presidential election a few months away. France had already taken steps to align its assistance program with operating methods of USAID and had moved the bulk of traditional economic assistance to the French Agency for Development operating in Djibouti. Thus its overall aid program is unlikely to be affected. Yet the loss of the advisors will surely be felt. They were a superb window for France onto Djibouti's government. For some Djiboutians, this could mean an opportunity to wean the country fully from remnants of its colonial past. The longer the affair festers, however, the more difficult will become France's relationship with Djibouti's current president. We are likely to see in the coming days several phone exchanges between Chirac and Guelleh in an effort to lower the temperature, and ease the damage, in this boiling affair. End comment.

17. (U) Khartoum minimize considered.
RAGSDALE